

21.211
Final Writing Assignment

Due in class, December 9

Write an essay of six pages length (double-spaced, normal margins and font) that compares the phenomena discussed in the last section of term (recovered memory, multiple personality, and fears of space alien abductions and satanic conspiracies etc.) with the witch hunts in Europe and New England and the examples of spirit contact discussed in the first section of the subject. In your essay, consider no less than three and no more than five significant points of similarity or difference. These may include, among others:

- the procedures by which abductions and abuse or witchcraft are discovered, including the place of special methods to discover hidden truths
- the non-ordinary physical and psychological states experienced by some participants (abductees, victims, mediums, trancers, afflicted girls) in these events; the way in which others involved influence and shape their experiences and accounts of those experiences
- how claims about spirit possession do or do not resemble claims about multiple personality and satanic control in terms of ideas about personal identity and responsibility
- the nature and role of the non-human beings, if any, with whom participants come in contact
- the place of gender
- the role of privileged experts, both in influencing particular cases and in shaping the public's understanding of what might be going on. The relationship between the ideas of elites and ordinary people.
- the way in which shared images, fears, hopes and scenarios originate, are shaped and changed, and consolidate into a relatively consistent understanding of what is going on; the role of printed books, pamphlets, sermons, magazines, newspapers and other mass media in shaping and developing those images and fears
- the way in which individual cases are handled and the role, if any, of legal procedures
- the ways in which claims about dangerous conspiracies, closeness of contact with the spirits world etc. indirectly express fears and preoccupations widely shared in society

This assignment lets you show incisive and creative thought about course material as well as your knowledge of the material itself. Favor analysis over factual exposition, and especially avoid spending much space in your essay rehashing the details of the witch craze or snake-handling.

You do not have to decide that the material covered in the last section of the course is very like the witch craze or spirit possession---you may argue for difference rather than similarity, or a mixture of both. Some points of similarity and difference may apply more to one or two cases than to others. But you must argue your point cogently and back it up with citations of readings and material from class.